

# *Kay the seneschal in Chretien de Troyes and his predecessors*

Article

Published Version

Noble, P. (1975) Kay the seneschal in Chretien de Troyes and his predecessors. Reading Medieval Studies, 1. pp. 55-70.  
ISSN 0950-3129 Available at  
<https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/83248/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

Publisher: University of Reading

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [End User Agreement](#).

[www.reading.ac.uk/centaur](http://www.reading.ac.uk/centaur)

**CentAUR**

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

### KAY THE SENESCHAL IN CHRETIEN DE TROYES AND HIS PREDECESSORS<sup>1</sup>

In Arthurian romance Kay is one of the few figures of Celtic legend who survives into the French romances in an important position. He is not, of course, one of the leading knights of the Arthurian court as he is rarely the hero and indeed is not particularly effective as a knight when compared with the hero. He is, however, one of the leading figures of the second rank and makes an appearance in most of the romances. A recent study has treated the development of Kay in the German romances which are based on Chrétien<sup>2</sup> and includes some illuminating remarks on Chrétien himself. The author tends to consider Chrétien as the originator of the character of Kay whereas other critics see clear traces of the character in the *Mabinogion* and consider that Chrétien was developing elements which were already there.<sup>3</sup> It is necessary to consider Chrétien's predecessors as well as his own writings to see just how far the character of Kay changes.

Kay's existence in Welsh literature can be traced back to the tenth century. He is mentioned in a poem of the *Black Book of Carmarthen*, probably dating from the tenth or the eleventh century and he figures with Arthur and Lluch Llaunnauc when they are refused entrance by the surly porter. This episode is probably the source of the famous carving at Modena where Che is one of the companions of Arthur. He is one of the leading warriors of Arthur's Welsh court. For example in the *Dream of Rhonabwy* he first appears as an unnamed rider.

'... coming with mail upon him and his horse, and its rings as white as the whitest water lily and its rivets red as the reddest blood.'<sup>4</sup>

Rhonabwy asks who he is and is told;

'The rider thou seest yonder is Cei. The fairest man who rides in Arthur's court is Cei. And the man on the flank of the host is hurrying back to the centre to look on Cei riding and the man in the centre is fleeing to the flank lest he be hurt by the horse.'<sup>5</sup>

At the end of the dream when a truce is arranged between Arthur and Osla Big-Knife, Cei summons Arthur's followers to be with him that night in Cornwall, and the others are to come at the end of the truce.

The descriptions clearly suggest that as far as this author was concerned Cei was the outstanding warrior in the army of Arthur. Furthermore he held a position of authority in it.

This impression is borne out by *Culhwch and Olwen*.<sup>6</sup> Culhwch starts his request for a boon from Arthur by invoking the names of Cei and Bedwyr which suggests that these are the mightiest lords at the court of Arthur. In the tracking down of the innumerable objects needed by Culhwch to win Olwen, Cei plays a prominent part, showing a quick wit as well as great physical courage. It is he who thrusts a stake into the arms of the wife of the shepherd when she comes to embrace them and thus saves them all from being lovingly squeezed to death. It is he who gains admittance to the castle of the giant Wnach as a sword furbisher and then by a ruse admits Bedwyr and kills Wnach. It is he with Gwyrhryr, Interpreter of Tongues, who rides on the shoulders of the salmon to rescue Mabon from prison, and it is Cei and Bedwyr who kill Dillus and pluck his beard to make a lead for Drudwyn the hound. Here, however, we see a sign of another side of Cei, for Arthur sings an englyn which offends Cei so much that he refuses to take any further part in the search, and indeed the other lords have difficulty in making peace between Arthur and Cei. The churlishness to which Loomis attached such importance<sup>7</sup> occurred when Culhwch first arrived at court after the meal had begun. It was the custom that no-one should then be admitted until the next day. Cei would not have broken the custom but Arthur overruled him. In spite of Loomis' arguments this seems to me not so much churlishness as a rigid insistence on protocol.<sup>8</sup> It ties in with his role of seneschal in the French romances that Kay should be responsible for the organisation of the court. Here he sees no reason to alter the court rules for this stranger. He accepts, however, the superior authority of Arthur. Certainly Cei is not welcoming but it is easy with hind-sight to read too much into this little scene. Cei's father describes his son in a way that is consistent with the attitude of Cei to Culhwch.

'If there is anything of me in my son, maiden, cold will his heart be ever, and there will be no warmth in his hands ... if he is my son, headstrong will he be ... there will be no servant or officer like him.'<sup>9</sup>

Cold-hearted but an outstanding servant and officer, what could be a better description for Cei's treatment of Culhwch? A further proof of his outstanding quality is that when Gwyddawg, the son of Menestyr, killed Cei, Arthur himself avenged the killing. Cei has been presented as an (if not the) outstanding warrior of the entourage of Arthur.

He is touchy, brusque and cold-hearted but he is not the arrogant, sarcastic knight of some of the French romances.<sup>10</sup>

This interpretation is confirmed in the Black Book of Carmarthen<sup>11</sup> where, in the poem when Arthur and Cei are refused entrance by the porter, much of the poem is a eulogy of Cei.

In the heights of Ystavingon  
Cai pierced the nine witches.  
Cai the fair went to Mona,  
To devastate Llewon.  
His shield was ready  
Against Cath Palug  
When the people welcomed him. (xxxi, 78-84)<sup>12</sup>

This is Arthur speaking about Cei.<sup>13</sup> In the triads in which he occurs, Cei is mentioned twice in relation to his horse<sup>14</sup> or rather horses as it is once a war horse 3 and once a work horse 60 but more interesting are two other triads 29 and 63. In 63 Cei figures with Arthur, March and Bedwyr trying to steal pigs from Tristan and failing as Tristan is one of the three great swineherds, while in 29 Cei is one of the taleithiawc, warriors bearing a diadem, a mark of some distinction.<sup>15</sup> Cei's position in Welsh literature is admirably summarised by Bruce. 'In these poems, as in Welsh literature generally — excepting the pieces that betray French influence... — Cai (Kay) plays a heroic rôle — not that of a butt as in the French romances.'<sup>16</sup>

In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*<sup>17</sup> the personality of Kay barely emerges but such as it is, it has changed little from the Welsh. He is now described as Arthur's seneschal, and when Gaul has been conquered he is granted the whole of Anjou of which he becomes Duke. He is at Caerleon for the nomination and, as befits the seneschal, he is clad in ermine and is in charge of the serving. Arthur chooses Kay and Bedivere to accompany him when he goes to fight the giant but they play no active part in the fighting. Nevertheless this is surely a mark of great honour that these two should be selected for such a dangerous mission, and this is further proof of the very great esteem in which Arthur holds Kay. Bedivere and Kay jointly command a squadron of troops at the battle of Soissie where Kay is fatally wounded, rescuing the corpse of Bedivere. Nevertheless he routes the Medes, who had killed Bedivere, and escapes from an attack by the King of Libya. He dies at Chinon which he had built and where he is buried. He never comes to life as a character, for already new faces are making their appearance to occupy some of the more glamorous rôles. It is clear, however,

that in Geoffrey's eyes Kay is still a leading warrior and a respected personality at the court.

Wace<sup>18</sup>, although drawing largely on Geoffrey, has added to the character of Kay. To Wace Kay is 'un chevalier preu et leal' (1611-12). Later Kay and Bedivere are singled out for praise.

Cil dui erent molt si feoil.

Et savoient tot son conseil. (1619-20)

Arthur tells them his plan for attacking the giant.

Nen volt parler a nul altre home. (2773)

In the battle against the Romans each leads his own squadron and fights so well that Wace says;

Quel seneschal quel botellier...

Molt orent fet et plus feissent... (4033-4036)

They die the same death as in Geoffrey but Wace also mentions their great love for each other. Building on very little he brings the character to life as one of the most important, faithful and fierce knights of Arthur. There is no hint of criticism or disparagement of any sort. Clearly the elements in the Welsh on which Loomis bases his case for the churlishness of Kay were not so powerful that the first non-Welsh writers felt obliged to include them. To Geoffrey and to Wace Kay is an outstanding warrior and a trusted follower of Arthur.<sup>19</sup>

The theory of Loomis is that the disagreeable elements of the character of Kay are already present in the Welsh, where there is a contrast drawn between the characters of Kay and Gauvain. The Breton conteurs developed this clash, stressing the opposing sides of the two characters, and so the disagreeable character of Kay became established.<sup>20</sup> If so, this can only have happened after the writing of Wace and Geoffrey, because, as has been shown, there is nothing in either of these writers to provide the slightest support for such a theory. Rather more attractive is the suggestion of Frappier.<sup>21</sup> Agreeing that Kay was originally a great warrior in the Welsh tradition which survives in Geoffrey and Wace, he suggests that Kay loses prestige in part because of his office. It would have been his duty to prevent waste and corruption at the court and such people are never popular with those whose freedom of action they limit. This would apply particularly to the Celts with their belief in the importance of presents. As seneschal he would be viewed no more favourably by the French writers as his judicial duties would also not gain him popularity. There is also the point that the seneschal was increasingly portrayed in the twelfth and thirteenth

centuries as a traitor which eventually Kay himself becomes.<sup>22</sup> Kay's reputation therefore would be under a three-sided attack, and it is little wonder that he failed to maintain his original reputation and status. This theory helps to explain why Chrétien chose to make Kay so much less attractive than previous writers. One must also accept the argument of Herr Haupt<sup>23</sup> that Chrétien established a character which the majority of later authors were content to accept and adapt to their own purposes, developing such aspects as happened to fit into their plan. On the other hand I would hesitate to accept the argument of Herr Haupt that Chrétien deliberately develops the character through his romances and that there is a clear chronological progression from *Erec* to *Perceval*.<sup>24</sup> Chrétien uses his characters as he needs them and as much as he needs them. I have tried to show elsewhere with regard to Guinevere that he is not concerned if the characteristics vary from one romance to another<sup>25</sup>, and there is no reason why it should be any different for Kay.

It must also be borne in mind that Chrétien is not concerned with the psychological realism of his characters in the modern meaning. As Chrétien allows his characters to work out the ideas and problems which interest him, he is unworried by contradictions which may then emerge. If the character of Kay should be lacking in unity, as Herr Haupt describes it, this does not concern Chrétien who is not interested in the probability of the character. If he has to make Kay a character lacking in unity to satisfy the demands of his story, then so be it. His characters exist within the confines of the book, their features are those necessary for that particular book, and any realism is incidental, although no doubt based on personal observation.<sup>26</sup> For all these reasons it seems dangerous to insist that Chrétien is attempting to develop a consistent character from one romance to the next.

The only romance of Chrétien in which Kay does not appear is *Cligés*. This is the romance which is least concerned with the 'matière de Bretagne', and so the absence of this Welsh-based figure is perhaps understandable. It is also the romance which is least concerned with Arthur's court where Kay usually makes his appearance. Obviously he could have been introduced if Chrétien had so desired, but his presence is unnecessary and would be an irrelevance as Chrétien is concerned with other problems than those with which one associates Kay.

Kay appears in *Erec et Endie*<sup>27</sup> in a very reduced role. There are several unimportant references to him early in the poem, when he is at the council on what to do about the kiss of the White Stag. He is sent by Gauvain to inform the Queen of the arrival of Yder (1107) whom he was the first to see. (1091) His subordination to Gauvain is established at this point but his behaviour is gracious and perfectly unexceptionable both in the delivery of his message and in the way he escorts the Queen. (1130) Kay and Perceval follow the royal couple to the window to look at Erec as he returns. (1506) As Roques omits the lines about Gronosis, his son, who was versed in evil, which are in Foerster's edition<sup>28</sup>, there is nothing to spoil the picture of an efficient, polished seneschal carrying out his tasks with skill and courtesy, closely linked to the royal family, although accepting an inferior position at the court to the less important members of the family.

The only scene in which Kay is a principal character is when he takes Gauvain's horse and weapons without his permission. (3938) When Kay meets the wounded Erec, whom he does not recognise as Erec and Enide wish to preserve their incognito, although they recognise him, he seizes his reins 'sanz saluer' and wants to know who Erec is. (3965-67) The request is made 'par son orguel' (3967) which makes it clear that Kay is in the wrong from the start of this scene. Despite Erec's brutal rebuff Kay persists, explaining that he was trying to help as he can see that Erec is wounded. Erec still tells him to mind his own business, (3991) and Kay loses his temper, threatening to force Erec to come to Arthur. Kay's speech is couched in violent terms (3995-4003) creating a very unfavourable impression of imperiousness. His superficial politeness has quickly disappeared. Erec's answer shows his scorn and contempt and is calculated to inflame the most pacific knight as he addresses Kay;

'Vasax, fet il, folie faites...

de rien vers vos ne me gardoie.' (4005-10)

He also calls Kay 'Orgueilleus et por estout'. (4014) The combination of these words with folie and Erec's contemptuous attitude make it inevitable that they fight. With great consideration Erec uses the blunt end of his lance as Kay is unarmed. (4023) Kay is unhorsed, and Erec takes the horse. Kay has to beg for its return.

molt bel le losange et blandist ... (4036)

Again the tone is set by the word *losange* which is pejorative and picks up *losangerie* used in line 4034 of Kay so that the audience is definitely given the idea that there is something despicable in Kay's attitude. As Erec has no wish to keep Gauvain's horse, he

gives it back, and Kay has to return to the court and confess all. No doubt he felt humiliated, even more so when Gauvain succeeds so skilfully in his task of bringing Erec to the court, although he achieves it by bringing the court to Erec. Chrétien prepares the audience for the success of Gauvain.

Gauvain estoit de molt grant san; (4088)

The contrast with the *orguel* of Kay is obvious, and in every way the behaviour of the knights is contrasted. Kay's failure on Gauvain's horse is implicitly contrasted with Gauvain's feats, Kay's behaviour is explicitly contrasted with Gauvain's, as indeed are his language and his whole attitude. The contrast is wholly unfavourable to Kay.

As can be clearly seen, there is a marked change from the great warrior hero of the earlier writers. Kay is reasonably polite to those whom he recognises as his superiors and in a sense is well disposed towards the wounded Erec until he fails to get his own way. He is no coward as he is prepared to joust without armour, although the result is that he is humiliated. Chrétien does not spare him in the scene with Erec, for he comments on his pride, his ability as a flatterer and his folly in acting as he does. The picture of a rash, overbold man who has to wheedle his way out of his difficulties is not and is not meant to be attractive. Nevertheless Kay is being sacrificed to the interests of the other characters. All critics agree that Chrétien is deliberately contrasting the *maladroitness* of Kay with the polished behaviour of Gauvain. He is also contrasting Kay with Erec as Chrétien is displaying Erec's magnanimity and strength of will. There is an element of comedy in the effortless unhorsing of Kay but it is not very pronounced. Chrétien is more concerned with showing the determination of Erec not to be deflected from his chosen course.

One must agree with Herr Haupt when he says 'Im Erec scheint der Autor noch kein spezielles Interesse an der Keie-Figur zu Haben.'<sup>29</sup> Kay is a foil for the other more important knights. He is a useful vehicle because he is already recognised as an important and regular member of Arthur's court, but it would seem that there was no clear pattern imposed on Kay by previous authors which Chrétien felt he had to follow, and as yet he himself had no very clear conception of the character, except that he was not to be one of the leading heroes.

In *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*<sup>30</sup> Kay has two important scenes. From the very beginning his importance to the King and to the Queen



is made clear as they both in turn beg him to stay. The Queen even goes so far as to kneel to him. Arthur has already said;

... que je n'ai en cest monde rien  
que je, por vostre demorance,  
ne vous doigne sanz porloignance. (108-110)

The Rash Boon motif has been introduced, and this is amplified when the Queen speaks.

Kex, fet ele, que que ce soit  
et ge et il l'otroierons. (158-9)

The position of Kay is made clear. He is a highly valued and esteemed member of the court, which is, however, horrified when it hears what his request is. They do not expect to see the Queen again, and the general dismay indicates their opinion of Kay's fighting qualities. No-one is prepared to intervene or go in pursuit of Kay until Gauvain points out to Arthur how foolish he has been. This scene provides further evidence for the courage of Kay and the respect in which he is held by the King. The manner in which Kay requests his boon, however, is far from gracious, and the picture created is of an ambitious man, over-confident, trading on the affection of others and lapsing into petulance to make sure of getting his own way. Kay fails in his self-appointed mission as he must do to allow Gauvain and more particularly Lancelot to occupy the central roles in the poem.

Kay reappears in the poem at the court of Bademagus where he is lying wounded, and Lancelot is brought to see him. Kay expresses his shame at his failure to do what Lancelot has done, but he is unable to explain the Queen's anger against Lancelot. When Kay is accused of sleeping with the Queen, she defends him fiercely.

Je cuit que Kex li seneschax  
est si cortois et si leax  
qu'il n'en fet mie a mescroire.  
Certes Kex n'est mie tex hom  
qu'il me requeiest tel outrage. (4839-44)

Kay himself, although still very ill, is quite ready to fight Meleagant because he knows that he is innocent. Lancelot adds that anyone who knows Kay would never doubt him on such a point. Here Kay is again a useful vehicle for the author since he is the means by which Lancelot can fight against Meleagant for the rightful cause. Without his presence Lancelot would be in danger of having to defend an unjust cause. The bravery of Kay and the trust which he places in adherence to honourable standards emerge very clearly. Later Kay offers to go in search of the missing Lancelot, and when he

does finally leave the court of Bademagus, he offers him his service, as he should.

Throughout the poem Kay has behaved like a brave and true knight. He is rash and overconfident in his own strength, but he seems to have the esteem of all (although they lack confidence in him as a jousting knight), and there is little sign of his sharp tongue in this poem. The picture of him seems more sympathetic because he is not being measured against the other knights of Arthur's court to quite the same extent as in the other poems. His role is to make the abduction of Guinevere possible and secondly to provide a convenient scapegoat for the accusations of Meleagant so that Lancelot can defend Guinevere and the rightful cause at one and the same time. His character is not exactly the same as in *Erec* but then Chrétien is writing about a different situation and a different problem, so that Kay is not required to play the same role.

The same remark applies even more forcefully to *Yvain*.<sup>31</sup> Chrétien describes him:

Et Kes qui mout fu ransposneus  
fel et poignanz et afiteus... (68-69)

when he scolds Calogrenant so sharply for having made the rest of the knights look discourteous.<sup>32</sup> Kay is clearly annoyed and in his irritation vents his anger on Calogrenant although one may guess that he is annoyed as much with himself. He also speaks sharply to the Queen. Both Calogrenant and the Queen seem to accept this as normal behaviour for Kay. Calogrenant comments;

A miauz vaillant et a plus sage  
Mes sire Kes! que je ne sui,  
Avez vos sovent dit enui; (112-114)

The Queen twice rebukes Kay for his rudeness (113-134) and (612-629). This wilful rudeness and unprovoked sarcasm are something new in the character of Kay. I find it hard to accept that the seeds for these characteristics are to be found in the two previous romances. This is an example of Chrétien adapting his character to the needs of his story. Here he wants someone who will make *Yvain*'s determination to hurry secretly away from the court even stronger. Kay's sarcasms increase the desire of *Yvain* for secrecy, and in this way Chrétien uses Kay to achieve his purpose, the secret departure of *Yvain*, and makes Kay rude and sarcastic to bring about the desired result.

Having once established this feature of Kay's character Chrétien naturally continues to make use of it in the rest of the poem. At the

fountain Kay is again sarcastic about Yvain as Chrétien prepares the way for Yvain to establish himself still higher in the eyes of the court. Gauvain, as so often, defends Yvain against Kay, fulfilling his role of arbiter and standard setter. Kay demands the first joust, as the audience were warned he would, as this had been another reason why Yvain had wanted to be first at the spring. (681-682).

Il voloit comancier toz jorz  
Les batailles et les estorz  
ou il i eust grant corroz. (2231-33)

Chrétien is still making the point that Kay is extremely courageous. Yvain is delighted at the opportunity to get his revenge on Kay and unhorses him, at which the court mocks him. They are sorry for him as well, as he had never been unhorsed before. This tribute to Kay is intended to increase the prestige and valour of Yvain. Kay is mortified at the discovery that he wrongfully mocked Yvain. The last time that Kay is mentioned is when the brother-in-law of Gauvain tells Yvain that Kay had tricked the King into allowing him to escort the Queen, the result of which was her abduction by Meleagant.

It is clear that Kay is not to be regarded as one of the leading knights but the comment that he had never been unhorsed before suggests that he is meant to be a doughty and worthy opponent. His role is twofold. He spurs Yvain into carrying out the adventure, and it is fear of his tongue which helps to make Yvain decide to stay at Laudine's court.

amours et honte le retiennent... (1535)

The 'honte' will stem from what Kay says. At the same time Kay provides a measure of the rising status of Yvain who is able to beat him. Although he is high in the King's favour, the opening scene makes it clear that Kay is not meant to be regarded as a sympathetic character. He is the gadfly of the court. Chrétien is not sufficiently interested in him to resolve the contradictions. He is content to present the character according to the requirements of the individual scenes. The element which most clearly links him with the Kay of the earlier poems is his undeniable courage and his readiness to fight. His rudeness and his sarcasm seem to be new features grafted onto the character to provide suitable motivation for the hero to whom as ever Kay is sacrificed.

In *Le Roman de Perceval*<sup>33</sup> the treatment of Kay is different again. Kay who has been wounded is sarcastic about Perceval and

uses violence to the fool and the maiden who bear witness to the future greatness of Perceval. This is highly unknighly and marks the nadir of Kay's behaviour in Chrétien. Arthur reproaches Kay for driving such a knight as Perceval from the court, after Perceval's success, and there is the recurrent motif of the messages from Perceval vowing vengeance on Kay. It is only the displeasure of Arthur which prevents Kay from killing the fool when he shows his joy at these messages. All the same Chrétien allows Kay a splendid appearance.

E Kex parmi la sale vint,  
trestoz desaffublez et tint  
en sa main destre un bastonet  
el chief un chapel de bonet  
dont li chaveil estoient blont.  
N'ot plus bel chevalier el mon... (2793-8)

As Haupt says, 'Der äussere Glanz, der die felenies trop descubertes (2814) nicht verdecken kann, steigert noch Furcht und Abscheu der Hofgesellschaft;'.<sup>34</sup> The contrast is made between the outward beauty of Kay and his nature which is evil. All fear him, and Arthur himself describes Kay to Gauvain.

Et Kiex, qui anieus estoit  
et est encor et toz jorz iert  
Ne ja nul bien dire ne quiert. (4114-17)

Chrétien himself adds when Kay makes fun of Sagremor who has been unhorsed by Perceval;

Et Kex, qui onques ne se pot  
Taire de felonie dire... (4274-5)

Clearly his evil tongue and propensity to make mischief are well established in this poem but nonetheless everyone is sorry for him, when Perceval breaks his arm, while a point is made of the King's affection for him.

Et li rois, qui molt l'avoit tendre  
Et molt l'amoit en son corage... (4338-39)

Gauvain arouses Kay's wrath by criticising the behaviour of Kay and Sagremor, and Kay comments bitterly that Gauvain will bring Perceval back without a fight. Gauvain retorts that at least he will manage without a broken arm. Even so Kay is caustic about Gauvain's success, and Chrétien makes it clear that it is in his nature.

Einsi dist Kex, soit drois ou tors,  
Sa volenté si comme il suelt. (4532-33)

In *Perceval* Kay's character takes a wholly new turn. It is perhaps not completely unexpected, in that in *Yvain* he was rude and sarcastic but for the first time Chrétien comments in *Perceval* on how unpleasant Kay could be and makes the point that this could have evil results. Despite his bravery and his position high in the favour of the King he is unpleasant and difficult, traits coming to be associated with a seneschal perhaps. He uses physical violence to those weaker than himself, he is feared at court, and his good looks are used to point the contrast between his inner and outer natures. Here he is more obviously than ever used to make a contrast with the other knights, Gauvain and the hero, who in this poem happens to be Perceval. Both contrasts are, of course, to his disadvantage as the other knights (Gauvain and Perceval, the less perfect hero,) possess a variety of qualities which reveal Kay's shortcomings.

Despite the persistence of some common features in each portrayal of Kay it seems that one cannot say that Chrétien intended to produce a coherent and developed character which would grow from poem to poem. He produces instead a character who meets the requirements of each individual poem. He is thus portrayed relatively favourably in *Erec* and *Lancelot*, less so in *Yvain* and in an almost hostile manner in *Perceval*, where Chrétien is drawing the contrast not only between the knights' behaviour but also their moral outlook. Contradictions inevitably arise from the fact that some of the features which persist do not wholly correspond to those which Chrétien creates for the Kay-figure in each new situation. This would no doubt be a matter of comparative indifference to him. His characters exist only in so far as he needs them.

Chrétien makes very little use of the characteristics of Kay which existed before him. If one accepts the theories of Loomis or Frappier, then he could well have been influenced by a steadily less favourable tradition which the Bretons would have established, but there is little evidence for this in the first two portrayals of Kay not in Welsh. All the evidence suggests that Chrétien took the name of the character, a very few of the existing characteristics and then proceeded to adapt the character to his needs as and when he felt that the situation called for Kay. He makes him almost the 'trouble-maker' of the court and in the end finds him the most suitable character to portray as a malign influence at the court. It seems rash to say that this was his intention from the beginning or that the character develops steadily from one poem to the next. The most that one can say is that the Kay of the *Yvain* prepares the

way for the Kay of the *Perceval*. Even then these are two different conceptions of the character, because Kay exists independently in each poem and must be considered from that point of view.

Reading University

PETER NOBLE

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I must thank Mrs. R. Bromwich, Professor D.J.A. Ross, Dr. R. Bowen and Mr. P.A. Thurlow for their help and advice. The responsibility for any errors is, of course, mine.

<sup>2</sup> J. Haupt, *Der Truchsess Kei im Artusroman*, Philologische Studien und Quellen, 1971.

<sup>3</sup> J. Frappier, *Etude sur Yvain*, Paris, 1969, p.138.

R.S. Loomis, *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes*, New York, 1949, pp.154-155.

<sup>4</sup> *The Mabinogion*, trans. G. Jones and T. Jones, London, 1949, (Everyman 97), p.144.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.144.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.96-136.

<sup>7</sup> Loomis, *op.cit.*, pp.154-55.

<sup>8</sup> J.D. Bruce, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance*, Baltimore, 1928. Vol. i, p.49, discusses the character of Kay in *Culhwch and Olwen* but does not mention churlishness as a feature of Kay.

<sup>9</sup> *The Mabinogion*, p.103.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce, *loc.cit.* 'But it is a different Kay from the butt of the French Romances, who is always the first to undertake every adventure announced at Arthur's court and is always ignominiously overthrown. Not only is he a valiant warrior here as throughout Welsh tradition, but, like everyone else in this fantastic tale, he has marvellous qualities.'

<sup>11</sup> W. F. Skene, *The Four Ancient Books of Wales*, Edinburgh, 1868.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. i, pp.261-264.

<sup>13</sup> Bruce, *op.cit.*, p.40, note 7. '...In the second poem [relating to Arthur, Black Book of Carmarthen xxxi] Arthur and Cai are seeking entrance to a castle, but the porter, Glewlwyd Gavaelwawr (represented in the Welsh prose tales as one of Arthur's own porters) refuses until he knows more about the persons who wish to be admitted. Arthur eulogizes, then, his followers — particularly Cai, to a description of whose exploits most of the poem is devoted. Thus, although Arthur is the speaker, the piece is really a glorification of Cai.'

<sup>14</sup> J. Loth, *Les Mabinogion du Livre Rouge de Hergest*, Paris, 1913, Vol.ii pp.228 and 269. R. Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, Cardiff, 1961. pp.105

and 120. The numbers in the text refer to Loth. In Bromwich see nos. 42 and 46a.

<sup>15</sup> Loth, *op.cit.*, pp.270-271 and 254. Bromwich, *op.cit.*, pp.46-54. Loth's 63 is 26. pp.37-38. Loth's 29 is 21. She translates *taleithiawc* as 'battle diademed' and says that it was either a mark of distinction worn by the leading champions or worn perhaps as an incentive to draw the enemy's attention to them.

<sup>16</sup> Bruce, *op.cit.*, p.41, note 9.

<sup>17</sup> A. Griscom, *Historia Regum Britanniae*, London, 1929.

E. Faral, *La Légende Arthurienne*, 3 vols., Paris, 1911-1929.

<sup>18</sup> Wace, *La partie arthurienne du Roman de Brut de Wace*, ed. I. Arnold and M. Pelan, Paris, 1962. All references are to this edition.

<sup>19</sup> G. Paris, *Histoire littéraire de la France*, Vol. xxx, Paris, 1888, p.51. 'Dans Gaufrei de Monmouth Caius est nommé plusieurs fois avec éloge, et Wace, en reproduisant ces passages y ajoute de nouvelles louanges qui prouvent qu'il ignorait la légende défavorable bientôt formée autour du sénéchal.'

<sup>20</sup> Loomis, *loc. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> Frappier, *op.cit.*, p.138.

<sup>22</sup> In *Yvain* Laudine's seneschal is also presented as a villain while in the *Tristan* by Béroul Dinas makes a point of mentioning that he has not committed any of the crimes traditionally associated with seneschals. (Ed. A. Ewert, Oxford, 1963, 1091-1095).

<sup>23</sup> Haupt, *op.cit.*, p.31.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> P.S. Noble, *The Character of Guinevere in the Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, *Modern Language Review*, 67, 3, pp.524-35.

<sup>26</sup> E. Vinaver, *The Rise of Romance*, Oxford, 1971, pp.30-31. There is a full discussion of this argument by Professor Vinaver.

<sup>27</sup> *Erec et Enide*, ed. M. Roques, C.F.M.A. 80, Paris, 1955. All references to this edition.

<sup>28</sup> *Kristian von Troyes Erec und Enide*, ed. W. Foerster, Halle, 1909.

Ne li fiz Keu, le seneschal,

Gronosis qui mout sot de mal... (1739-40)

If these lines are accepted, then Kay is closely associated with evil, although not actually tainted by it himself. Nevertheless, these lines would mar the otherwise agreeable portrayal of Kay given by Chrétien. Herr Haupt goes a little far perhaps. '...eine Kennzeichnung, die nicht zufällig bald auf den Keu der späteren Romane übergehen wird.' (*op.cit.*, p.16). He uses the 1934 edition of Foerster which reads 'qui mout fut de mal'.



This makes the evil innate, where the earlier edition suggested that it was perhaps acquired. The later reading would involve Kay more directly as it would tend to suggest his responsibility for the evil nature of his son. The earlier edition lessons Kay's responsibility as Gronosis is presumably responsible himself for acquiring such knowledge.

<sup>29</sup> Haupt, *op.cit.*, p.16.

<sup>30</sup> *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, ed. M. Roques, C.F.M.A. 86, Paris, 1959. All references are to this edition.

<sup>31</sup> *Yvain*, ed. T. Reid, Manchester University Press, 1942. All references are to this edition.

<sup>32</sup> Loomis, *op.cit.*, pp.273-8, identifies Calogrenant as Kai-lo-grenant, a doubling of Kay, but as they are clearly separate characters in French, I do not propose to discuss Calogrenant.

<sup>33</sup> *Le Roman de Perceval*, ed. W. Roach, Paris, 1959. All references are to this edition.

<sup>34</sup> Haupt, *op.cit.*, p.25.

This makes the evil innate, where the earlier edition suggested that it was perhaps acquired. The later reading would involve Kay more directly as it would tend to suggest his responsibility for the evil nature of his son. The earlier edition lessons Kay's responsibility as Gronosis is presumably responsible himself for acquiring such knowledge.

<sup>29</sup> Haupt, *op.cit.*, p.16.

<sup>30</sup> *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, ed. M. Roques, C.F.M.A. 86, Paris, 1959. All references are to this edition.

<sup>31</sup> *Yvain*, ed. T. Reid, Manchester University Press, 1942. All references are to this edition.

<sup>32</sup> Loomis, *op.cit.*, pp.273-8, identifies Calogrenant as Kai-lo-grenant, a doubling of Kay, but as they are clearly separate characters in French, I do not propose to discuss Calogrenant.

<sup>33</sup> *Le Roman de Perceval*, ed. W. Roach, Paris, 1959. All references are to this edition.

<sup>34</sup> Haupt, *op.cit.*, p.25.